

A Family Affair

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2006 marked our 50th wedding anniversary and the 50th anniversary of Carmi's work life as a psychologist. Upon our return from a brief honeymoon, Carmi, then a graduate student at NYU, began a social psychology internship in the Veterans Administration. Our marriage is linked to Nina's psychology career in a different way: She entered graduate school at Columbia University in the anthropology department that year, but subsequently came to the realization that psychology had an apparently unbeatable advantage over cultural anthropology — no marital separation due to fieldwork in exotic locations. She transferred to the then-interdisciplinary Columbia social psychology program to complete her PhD, though as it turned out the reasoning behind this shift was not as sound it seemed at the time. Later in life, our marriage was a commuter one; from its 30th to 45th year, Nina commuted to our "home base" in Washington, DC, first from Pittsburgh (where by happenstance our two sons were living at the time) and then from New York City. A further irony is that Carmi ended up being the one who went away to do field work — in rural Mali.

Until coauthoring this article, our only joint contributions to psychology were our sons. (APS Fellow Jonathan Schooler is a professor of psychology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and Lael Schooler is a senior research scientist in the Center for Adaptive Behavior and Cognition of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development.) In fact, the only joint research in our family is by Jonathan and Carmi's sister Miriam Bendiksen. We and our sons have various intersecting areas of interest and knowledge, however, and we often read and comment on drafts of each other's papers; give both asked for and unasked for substantive, technical, and career advice; and trade gossip, professional and otherwise. Minimally, we are all curious about how and why people act and think the way they do. Nevertheless, our family interactions and interrelationships are much less marked by our common profession than is generally imagined by those who don't share it. Each of us has been asked countless times, "What do psychologists talk about at dinner?" If we do have family discussions about psychological issues, they are more likely to be about philosophical and ontological issues such as the function of consciousness than they are to be about the relative merits of various psychological approaches or theories. Mostly, we talk about the pleasures and concerns of daily life: the mechanics and fruits of staying healthy; enjoying the cultural amenities of the mind, eyes, ears, and stomach at home and in travel; and doing what we can to stay connected as a family across what is now four generations, two continents, and nine time zones.

Being in the family business does have advantages, however. Carmi's admission to the psychology graduate program at NYU was assisted by his uncle Isadore Chein, who was on the faculty. Nina's career in clinical psychopharmacology was launched because an NIMH (National Institute of Mental Health) colleague of Carmi's mentioned a job opening at the NIMH's Psychopharmacology Service Center. Jonathan and Lael saw both our enthusiasm and pleasure in our work lives and had the chance to meet other psychologists and tag along to meetings and conferences with us. And they both married psychologists. Jonathan was married to Tonya Engstler Kydland and Lael is married to Julia Kushner Schooler.

We do have a common substantive interest in schizophrenia. Although neither of us is a clinical psychologist by training or trade, we both have been involved in studies of this condition — the underpinnings of psychological functioning for Carmi and treatment and course for Nina. Carmi started studying social interaction in schizophrenia in the VA setting at the beginning of his career. Nina's first experience with schizophrenia patients came in a visit to the VA hospital where Carmi was working when she was struck by the lack of social interchange among people who were living together. For social psychologists, understanding schizophrenia remains an elusive target and an abiding common interest.

Carmi's work in Mali also provides a mutually engaging focus. It rekindled Nina's interests in ethnology and gives us a chance to experience very different cultures.

But when we think about our family of psychologists we keep coming back to the question of the relationship of genes and environment. Those who are interested in tracing the familial course of an illness often specifically exclude index cases in whom the illness could be traced to both sides of the family tree — the problem of assortative mating. We just accept the impossibility of disentangling the effects of nature and nurture in our lives and those of our children. ?
